

New Spaces for Old Treasures: Plans for the New Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum

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Introduction

The inauguration of the Islamic Department in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum on 18 October 1904 forged the new foundations for the hitherto neglected field of Islamic art in Germany. Within a few years, Berlin came to house several archaeological finds and monuments chronicling the “formation of Islamic art”. Similarly, Herzfeld’s pioneering 1910 article on the Mshatta façade and the Munich exhibition on *Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art* of the same year, involving the key participation of the Berliners Wilhelm von Bode, Friedrich Sarre and his assistant Ernst Kühnel, laid the cornerstone for the development of this discipline.¹ Consequently, the objects in Berlin bear material witness to a beginning in two senses: the discussions on the palace façade of Mshatta, one of the seminal works of early Islamic art in the eighth century, became the catalyst for the emergence of an Islamic history of art in the early twentieth century. As home for new techniques and patterns of taste in the ninth century, Samarra became the birthplace of Islamic archaeology from 1911. The same applies to the famous collection of carpets, which not only furnishes evidence of the far-reaching network propelling the early modern flow of tastes between the Middle East and Europe, but is also closely associated with the birth of carpet studies at this time.² This highly auspicious beginning was followed by the Ictus during the National Socialist reign of terror, resulting in the exile of Ernst Herzfeld and Richard Ettinghausen. Then came the widespread destruction wrought by the war and the removal of major parts of the collections to the Soviet Union. The ensuing decades of reconstruction, with the restitution and restoration work on Museum Island (East) and



Fig. 28.1: Projections into the future of the Museum Island: the new main entrance building (James Simon Gallery) and the Pergamon Museum with the new fourth wing upper left and the new entrance to the Museum of Islamic Art below the new fourth wing.

the new building in Dahlem (West) have characterised over half a century of division and reunification. The history of the museum during the twentieth century was turbulent and warrants a dedicated research project of its own.³

Reunification opened up new perspectives. In 2001, Volkmar Enderlein and his team succeeded in assembling and exhibiting the most important items that previously had been distributed across East and West.⁴ Relatively under-resourced, this exhibition was conceived as a provisional measure, since plans were already afoot to relocate to the North Wing of the Pergamon Museum. The initial planning for refashioning the Museum Island into a “temple city of the art and culture from 6,000 years of human history” commenced shortly after reunification. The Museum of Islamic Art was integrated into an overarching concept comprising two levels: whereas the individual museums of the Museum Island were to be interconnected by a subterranean Archaeological Promenade as a “contextual bond intended to link the cultures of the antique Occidental world to create an interdisciplinary overview”, the main circuit of the Pergamon Museum draws a line from the monumental architectures of the ancient cultures of the Middle East and the ancient Orient, including Babylon, through to the Islamic period and the Mshatta.⁵ The former directors Michael Meinecke and Volkmar Enderlein were the first to envision installing the Mshatta façade in the Museum’s North Wing, as part of the main circuit. Originally planned to be on the lower south side, the façade was given pride of place on the northern side of the North Wing, for which a hall-like space was to be created by breaking

through the dividing walls. The refurbishment of the Pergamon Museum will not only markedly enhance the presentation of the Mshatta façade, but also grant the Museum of Islamic Art some 3,000 square metres of additional exhibition space on four floors, 2.5 times greater than at present. From the central access courtyard, the Court of Honour, a vast entrance hall, will facilitate special access to our collection on Level 1, previously closed to visitors. The Mshatta façade, together with the most important artefacts and archaeological collections from the early Islamic period, are to be displayed in two spacious, interconnected halls on Level 2. On a far grander scale than the presentation in the South Wing, the main body of the collection will be exhibited in a complex sequence of rooms in the North Wing on Level 3. In cooperation with the neighbouring Bode Museum, two subterranean halls of the Archaeological Promenade on Level 0 will focus on Europe and Islamic art in late antiquity and the Middle Ages/Renaissance. Under the supervision of Enderlein's successor Claus-Peter Haase, and in collaboration with Jens Kröger and the team of Johannes Cramer and Dorothee Sack, the installation of the Mshatta façade was prepared in great detail, as was the placing and technical installation of the Aleppo Room, the Alhambra Dome, and various prayer and domestic niches. Before embarking on the next phase, i.e. the detailed planning room by room, we developed the concept presented here, replete with the requisite architectural modifications.⁶

When commencing the planning and restructuring of such a distinguished institution with its complex history, questions relating to the actual objectives are raised. What does one want to achieve? What is being mediated here? What strategies are being pursued? Who is our target audience? Consideration of these questions should be undertaken at various levels; essentially they pertain to (1) promoting a basic understanding of this collection and its artefacts; (2) the layers of meaning of these objects in terms of academic research and presentation; and (3) enhancing communications with our visitors under our remit as a public institution.

1. The Collection

Initially our focus must be directed at our holdings. Our collections describe chronologically and geographically the art, culture and archaeology of Muslim-influenced societies from late antiquity to the modern era. The temporal endpoint of our collection, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, marks, at the same time, our birth as a specialist discipline and the inception of the Museum itself. The early period of Islamic history has been carrying special significance since the founding phase of the Museum: the finds from Ctesiphon (fifth–seventh century), Khirbet al-Minya (705–715), Qusair Amra (~711), Mshatta (~744), Samarra (ninth century) provide a globally unique overview of the early period of Islamic history and its material culture. On the second layer of meaning, the main thrust of our collection describes the starting point of the scientific and institutional traditions in Germany, which are also embedded in the history of their time. Consequently, the holdings are predestined to encounter questions regarding the origins

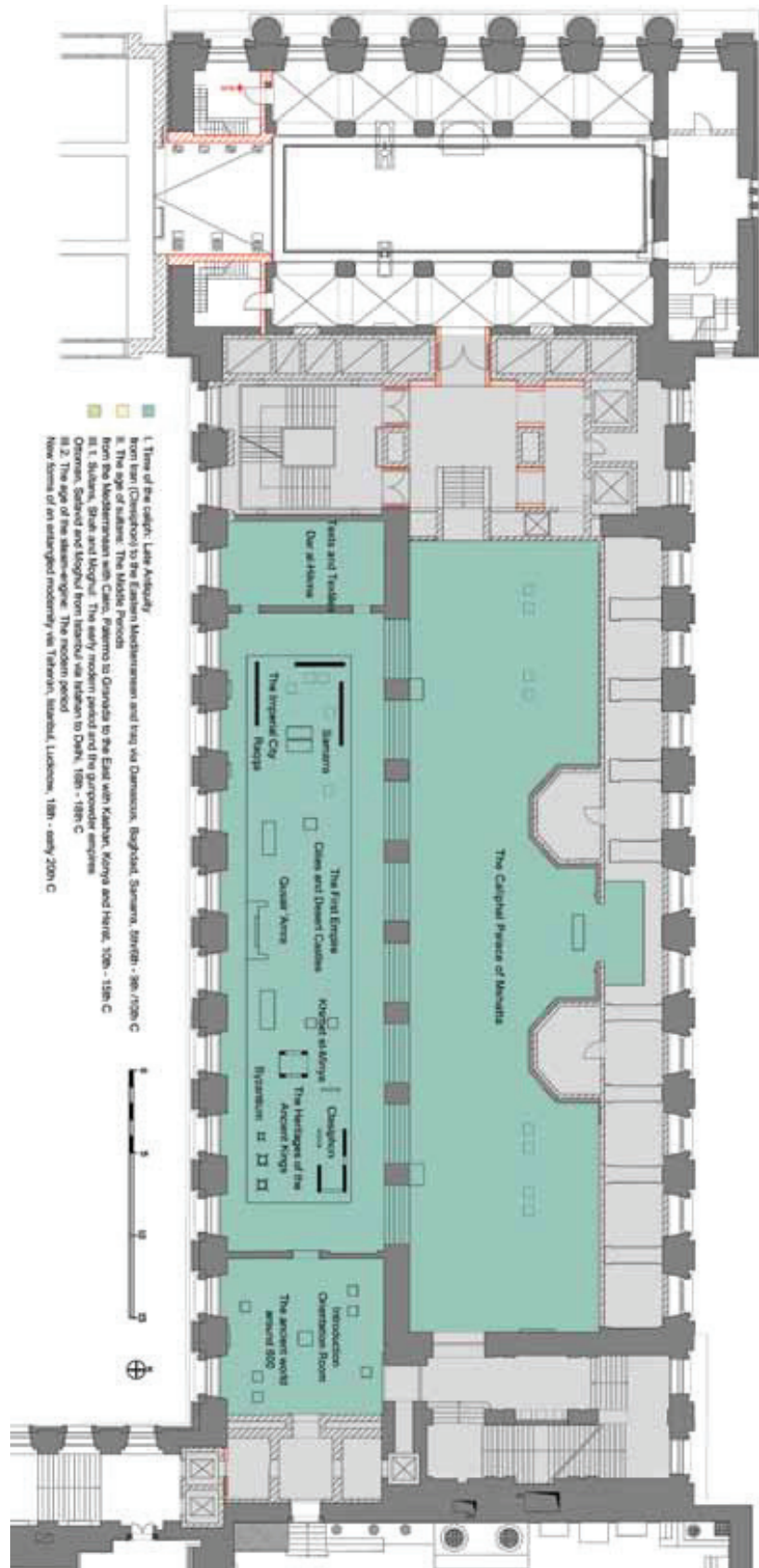


Fig. 28.2: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 2, main circuit, the conceptual layout for the new Mshatta hall (2012).

of the concepts and the provenance of its objects – questions, which, for good reason, are being increasingly directed at us.

By casting our gaze back into the past, we can furnish explanations as to the special characteristics of the Berlin collection, in which preference has always been accorded to a dynamic, cultural-historical conception over religious or cultural determinism. Once installed in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (today the Bode Museum), the Mshatta façade, initially deemed to be probably pre-Islamic, served effortlessly as the threshold into the Islamic Department. The early period of Islamic art was seen to be causally connected to late antiquity and did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Naturally, space has always been found for the archaeological finds from Ctesiphon (i.e., pre-Islamic ancient Iran), which today stand – on the basis of good scientific evidence – facing the Mshatta façade. Wilhelm von Bode's hanging of an Ottoman court carpet in the room of Italian sculptures and paintings in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in 1904 furnishes yet further evidence that although museums were divided into departments, they were transcended by an entangled understanding of art history. With the establishment of the new Islamic galleries in 1904, the art of the “Mohammedanic peoples” sought to occupy its due place within the Classical world cultures of the Mediterranean. Incorporated among the endeavours to re-evaluate non-European art and culture was the adoption of the masterpiece concept and, as such, the genesis of Islamic *art* itself (see Eva Troelenberg's contribution to this volume).

Our plans for the reorganisation embrace both the legacy of this collection and its structure. Moves, for example, to enhance the integration of modern and contemporary art, the history of religion or modern-day realities as a reflection of the cultural identities in Germany are of social and political significance, and should also spawn fresh approaches, new ideas or even a new collection policy. However, this does not constitute the core *raison d'être* of a collection comprising thousands of artefacts. Essentially our mission is to conserve and mediate the cultural-historical treasures entrusted to us. Predicated on our holdings, this encompasses, first and foremost, the cultural history of Islamicate societies, including their linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity, ranging from late antiquity through to the early modern era – with the aid of archaeological evidence, art and artisanship and material culture in general.⁷ Given the plethora of opinions on these concepts and objects, it is important to bear in mind what this collection actually contains and what the objects stand for. In a second step, discussions should be conducted on what tasks are to be (or could be) accomplished by our institution.

We have grown accustomed to classification and designation systems and nurturing research traditions. Despite the protracted discussions on the name and content of the academic discipline, we apply the term Islamic art almost exclusively in museums – although we are aware that the term “Islamic” confuses more than it explains, and that the term “art” comports more to our twentieth-century notions than those of the societies from which it originates (which does not devalue it).⁸ Placing into question the authority of this terminology will impact directly upon the meta-level of the museological

classification system (Islamic art, Byzantine art, Coptic art, antiquity, etc. to name just a few), on the designations established within the collection (dynasties, techniques, material, forms of decoration etc.) and on our understanding of the artefacts themselves and the concomitant arrangement/groupings of objects and their presentation in the Museum. Of fundamental importance for our new gallery code are not the terminology or concepts, but in a second step, and in keeping with the specifications of the collection's character, the layers of meaning of the objects themselves; and, as a third step, evolving forms and methods for their mediation to a wider public.

2. *The Objects' Layers of Meaning*

Layers of meaning derive both from the scientific research into the objects and from the designation of attributes from our encounter with them today (beautiful, ugly, original, important etc.). For no specific methods of scientific inquiry are reserved for the artefacts in our collection nor are there any taboos: the methodology of art history, archaeology, architectural history, social history, sociology, anthropology – anything which broadens our scientific knowledge of any object is welcome. The traditions of academic disciplines and the attendant terminology sometimes fuelled controversial debate. There is, however, no reason to exclude any possible interpretation of an object *per se*, nor to ascribe *interpretative sovereignty* to any one interpretation over another: any methods and interpretations capable of doing justice to the objects should, and must, be sought after. Predicated on holistic, scientific self-conception, we adhere to their subdivision into various layers of meaning or “layers of Islamic art”. Admittedly these are often closely intertwined, but should, under the concept of the exhibition, furnish a catalogue of presentational opportunities: technology, form and decoration, materiality, functionality, socio-spatial localisation, aesthetics and reception in various periods, the interaction with other objects, charged meanings, altered meanings and something without which no object would find its form – objects as the material manifestation of human systems of thought and the reflection of social realities. Both in their historical contextualisation and in their primary and secondary user-context, the artefacts are both a function and the embodiment of the dynamics and processes of social structures. With an archaeological excavation, this can be a sphere of life (*Lebenswelt*) context, or in the case of a masterpiece, a testament to technical, manual and artistic skills. The latter has shaped our concept of art, and has always constituted a special criterion within the Museum's collection policy and naturally we must do justice to this. However, the concept of art does not imply decontextualisation and the two should not be conflated. No artist in the twentieth century can be read without reference to the discourse of his own time; experiencing art within this discourse opens further horizons.

Of course, as indicated above, this also applies to the narrative in the contemporary user-context. The history of objects – ranging from their earlier user-contexts until the present day – is one of the layers of meaning. The path taken by the Mshatta façade

from Jordan, part of the then Ottoman province of Syria, or the tortuous journey of the Alhambra Dome from Granada to Berlin, are fascinating stories. These stories include the issue of provenience and contested heritage and require a constructive appraisal of the various positions. In all probability, the Aleppo Room would not exist today had its owner not offered it to the Museum via a German businesswoman in Aleppo in 1912, for which they received the princely sum of 22,262.20 marks. Hundreds of rooms were taken out and destroyed during the wave of new tastes at the dawn of modernity, “our” Aleppo Room is the only one of its age that survived. This also applies to the nature of the art and artefacts, which were generally created for local and international markets. The worldwide repatriation of all Meissner’s porcelain to Meissen would be utter nonsense. More problematic is the issue of architectural elements, which, if the primary context still exists, are then clearly absent. This must be discussed both from the legal and moral perspective and documented by the Museum. Even more problematic are objects from illicit excavations. The art trade of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is just as much a part of our history as are the preservation and restoration of cultural assets. Other aspects of our history are also subject to debate beyond the walls of the Museum and should also be addressed by us today: in the broadest sense, the Museum’s “world order”, which rigorously excludes regional modernities, established a fundamental nexus between the essentialistic, context-free styles and linguistics of Islam and the phenomena of Orientalism. Unwillingly our conception of Islamic art museums feeds as well other problematic concepts of culture which are dominated in the public discourse. Closed “museum spaces” do reflect and reconfirm closed “spaces of thought” which are based on self-referential and non-intertwined cultural entities. The understanding and presentation of cultures as isolated units that may only have contact along their borders does not reflect the historical and cultural experiences of societies past and present. In our case, this is mainly caused by our institutional organisation and some efforts were and need to be made to overcome this static approach.⁹

3. Communication with Visitors

The issue of visitors and target groups is dependent upon the specific type of museum. As a public institution, we are obliged to define as our target audience those groups which, in the broadest sense, reflect the social realities in Germany. On the Museum Island, this is augmented by international tourism. A museum such as ours must quite consciously serve a wide spectrum of visitors, which is currently drawn from the more highly educated social strata. According to our visitors’ survey “... some two-thirds of the visitors left school with qualifications which entitle them to a place at university. Only 16 per cent stated that they had attained intermediate secondary qualifications. A further 20 per cent of interviewees were school pupils.”¹⁰ Included among this group are enthusiastic museum-goers who always flock into museums for spectacular exhibitions; this group should be retained and cultivated. However, they do not constitute “the general public” as defined

under the statutes of Berlin's National Museums (SMB).¹¹ In order to attract the so-called poorly educated stratum, the Museum's pedagogical and educational structures must be improved and the exhibition concept broadened: taste and aesthetics are collectively evolved phenomena, invested with their own forms, codes and markings based on socio-economic background, and subject to permanent change. The exhibition conception in most art museums is geared towards a more educated audience. If one wishes to attract other visitor groups, then we must lower the threshold of the class-specific coding. Or to put more bluntly: the concept of aesthetic design and the linguistic patterns, etc. must be expanded to incorporate the non-academic social strata. This problem is further exacerbated by cultural patterns: due to their migratory background, many Muslims in Germany by virtue of the external and collective negative perception of their own cultural identity find themselves permanently in a defensive position, or rather only conditionally feel themselves part of the general public. In socio-political terms, "social inclusion" has come to assume quite different dimensions in this respect.

Thus in addition to the Museum and its collection, and the layer of meaning of the objects, our groups of visitors are also of paramount importance to us. Consequently, aspects of museum education and visitor behaviour, which hitherto have been neglected in the planning in Berlin, are now being consciously taken on board. This applies also to the various age groups: children and young people have hitherto not been addressed in our permanent installations – and meeting this requirement is not easy. Simplifying our description of the objects, for example, must not result in other groups feeling under-challenged. A lot of work lies ahead of us: although, as academics, we are well acquainted with the history of our objects, this does not apply to our target group, the 732.000 visitors coming up the stairs to our Museum in 2011. This is why we have decided to tackle this problem scientifically. Together with the project "*Experimentierfeld Museologie*" (Museological Laboratory. On Curating Arts and Cultures from Islamic-influenced Countries)¹² we conducted an empirical visitors survey in the autumn of 2009. Subsequently, the plans outlined here were presented to the Museum's educators: here the focus was on the behaviour of visitors and visitor flows – against the background of a highly complex entrance situation (see below).

Objectives

Before discussing in detail our aims in regard to the presentation of the objects and their mediation to visitors, I would like to summarise by stating that the objectives of our activity are formulated on the basis of a holistic approach to these complex and highly diverse artefacts, cultural forms and historical experience, and translate this into a spatial conception. But are we actually doing that? The systematic survey of museums, which I and my students have been conducting in recent years, revealed a yawning gap between educational requirements and the installed exhibition, resulting in non-expert visitors receiving only a very rudimentary insight into art, culture and history. For the time being,

these observations serve only as a working theory, and require scientific and empirical verification. However, we were able to conclude that despite the great diversity, of which we academics are aware, and which manifests itself in the plethora of dynasties, museums of Islamic art convey the notion of a closed cultural entity, which notwithstanding the depiction of influences from China or the continuing tradition of late antiquity, is primarily to be explained by and of itself. Among the reasons for this is the arbitrary order greeting the visitor:¹³ a presentation devoid of societal context, fragmented and removed from wider contexts, compounded by insufficient labelling and/or accompanying information, which due to the absence of clear historical and geographical references renders the objects isolated within the museum space. The only comprehensible frame of reference for visitors lies in the name of the gallery. Due to the traditional arrangement and purely aesthetic presentation of the art objects, crafted artefacts and archaeology, most museums of Islamic art do not adequately highlight the cultural dimensions of these exhibits. Thus, although museums of Islamic art mediate cultural systems, these systems are often experienced by the visitor as the very opposite in terms of complexity and diversity to that which has been long since revealed by historical-critical research. This is very important, as a museum for Islamic art serves as a primary source of information for many visitors. Particularly in a museum of non-European art, visitors are seeking cultural and geographical reference points, whereby inferences are drawn directly from the present context and projected onto these cultural systems (why did they ...?). Predicated on the views expressed here, the objective of the new plans is (1) to depict the complexity and diversity of current research into the objects of Islamic art and archaeology and (2) convey this to a wider public.

1. Complexity and Diversity

With foundations for an understanding of objects, material groups and periods of Islamic art having been laid during the course of the twentieth century, the focus of research in recent decades has been increasingly geared towards gaining a deeper appreciation of the more complex dynasties and artefacts. In an expansion of the methodological techniques and approaches, the objects have been illuminated and analysed in respect of their production, materiality, reception (aesthetic) and of their socio-historical and temporal contexts. This has raised the issue of the interaction of objects within their respective user-contexts; for example, how do carpets, ceramic vessels and interior furnishing form a harmonious and coherent ensemble? In the scientific analysis of the artefacts, one can clearly recognise that the objects never stand alone in isolation, but must also be seen and researched in conjunction with their respective context (history of production and usage, semiotics and anthropology). This applies particularly to the field of archaeology, which today excavates primarily in search of contexts, and secondarily, of objects. Although the artefacts are often displayed alone in the Museum's cabinets, historically – extending from their original production to their final user-context – they were always possessed

of a narrative, and consequently such a mode of presentation only partly meets current requirements. In addition to the aesthetic presentation, which is designed primarily to introduce the objects to the better-educated user-groups of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, our visitor survey revealed that our audiences are increasingly looking for contexts (see below). This chimes neatly with academic objectives, which attempt to perceive the object's various levels of meaning; this can range from their materiality and production to a broader set of meanings as elements of non-verbal communication in complex social systems. The implication for our presentation is greater contextualisation, which also places the individual objects in relation to each other. This is not new, but was already attempted with a different aesthetic and far fewer design possibilities by Wilhelm von Bode in his exhibition presentations. However, some objects will remain isolated. Masterpieces and other objects that possess special qualitative and aesthetic value, will be presented scenographically as key-objects.

2. Conveying Complexity and Diversity to Visitors

A key focus in the planning of the reorganisation and presentation of the objects was directed at the behaviour of visitors within the museum space, particularly in regard to the complicated entrance situation via the three storeys in the North Wing. The visitor survey revealed an expressed desire for greater insight into geographical, historical, political or social contexts, allied to a request for more information on the religion of Islam – which, if only by virtue of our name, visitors naturally expect.¹⁴ The reasons for this are obvious: the public visits the Museum and experiences the dimensions of another culture in order to find answers to their modern-day questions. Nowadays, there is a general demand for more information and education on other cultures. The complex history of Muslim cultures requires a lucid and simple organisation, which enables visitors to ascribe objects and historical narratives originating from other geographical and temporal contexts to known or easily learnable categories. For our gallery code we set out to devise a clear, comprehensive and transparent system. Hitherto we have provided a system of routes, both in the mediation and arrangement of the objects, which have remained impervious to visitors. As mentioned above, this includes an arrangement based on dynasties. From an early stage, museums of Islamic art worldwide established a chronological structure based on the most important ruling houses. An outcome of academic research, this proven system has been adopted by museums up to the present day, regardless of whether this arrangement enables visitors to classify exhibits into recognisable or easily comprehensible knowledge systems. Even if a dynasty is known – and our surveys have revealed that after completing the tour visitors can only recall on average 1.5 dynasties¹⁵ – neither the years, the centuries nor the specific political, social or historical characteristics of this dynasty were familiar to the visitor as a contextualising reference point, nor was this successfully conveyed. For this reason, we have decided to abandon this system of classification. However, it must be stressed that the chronological order of the objects of Islamic art,

which extends from late antiquity into the modern era, remains, of course, of crucial importance. Hitherto, these were arranged according to dynasties, but in future are to be reorganised into a radically simplified structure, chronologically arranged into three or four epochs, which derive from historical and art historical research into the Islamic world (see below). Thematically this arrangement permits supra-regional manifestations of a crosscultural *Zeitgeist*, such as the Mediterranean trade in the eleventh/twelfth centuries or the great cupolas of the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries, which are to be viewed synchronously instead of being arranged “vertically” within a diachronic, culture-specific linear (art) historiography.¹⁶ This horizontal comparability and subsumation within a universal history enable the constraints of an institutional, cultural-spatial interpretation to be overcome. These epochs stand in relation to the history of the extended Mediterranean region, and consequently afford the European visitor the opportunity of allocating the objects of Islamic art to relatively well known or easily learnable historical epochs. The objective is to grant visitors the right to see the objects within an overall context and narrative. As outlined below, further organisational criteria include geography, a socio-spatial framework and key themes – to ensure that visitors are able to orientate themselves at every stage of the exhibition. This is important because, in contrast to the configuration of our present exhibition in the South Wing, no categorical circuit can be prescribed.

Circuit and Visitor Orientation

In addition to formulating a thematically and intellectually cohesive and consistent plan, great importance must be placed on the mediation of the content on a structural level (detailed, room by room planning has not yet started at the time of writing). This planning phase is concerned with whether the main themes of the exhibition can be communicated to an audience which is characterised by different flows, access points, speeds and requirements.

The basic problem is the highly complex entrance situation, featuring a special entrance hall on Level 1 for visitors heading specifically for the Museum of Islamic Art, whereas the main stream of visitors enters from the east, passing first through the Hellenistic Room and then into the new Mshatta hall. Both on Level 2 and Level 3, the two staircases facilitate access from both sides. In all likelihood, the main flow of visitors will pass through the Mshatta main circuit towards the Mshatta façade, where they will decide whether to leave the exhibition on the left, or turn right into the upper storey of the Museum of Islamic Art. Due to the various access possibilities and the complex situation regarding the heritage-listed rooms, there is no possibility of guiding visitors along a linear route on Level 3.

The first two exhibition rooms leading from the staircases are intended as circulation zones, which serve as an introduction and a means of orientation for visitors. Clear mediation and orientation might be best achieved through a simple, clearly structured modular system, comparable with a “building-block system”, which facilitates rapid

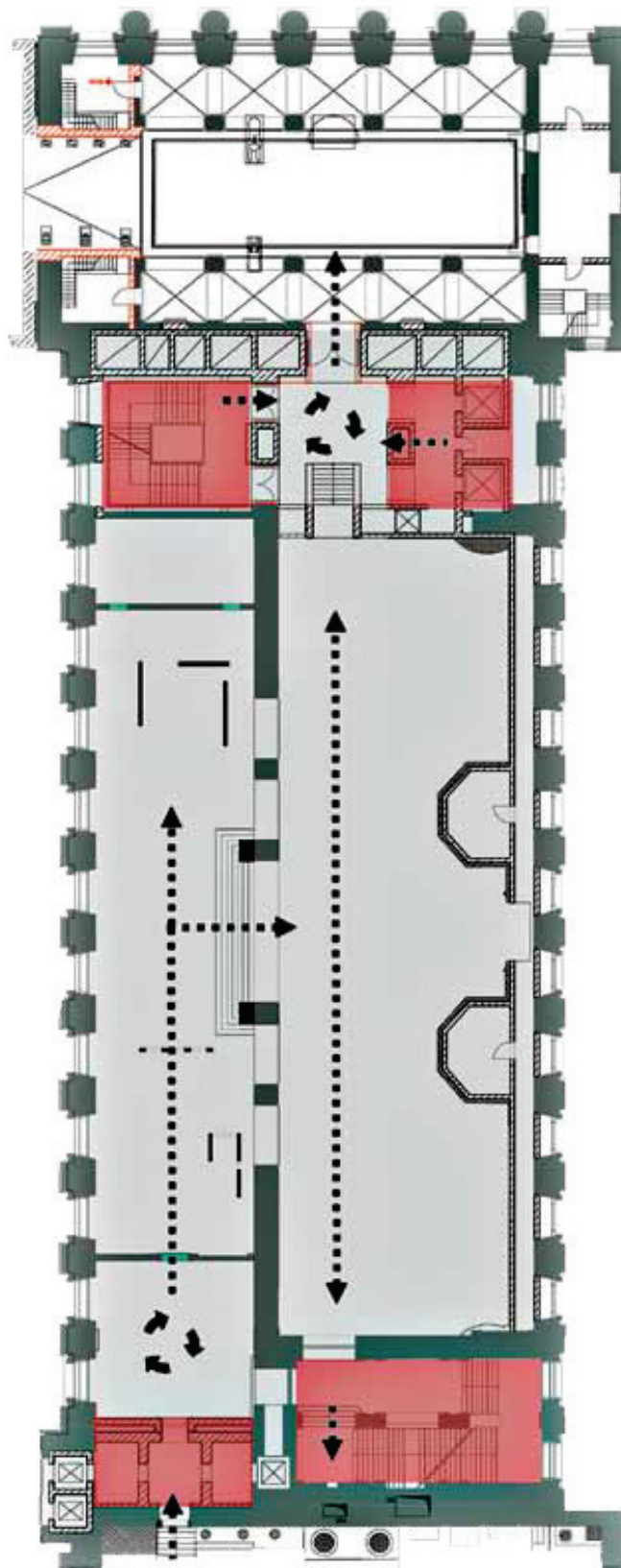
orientation for everyone. Visitors must be able to systematically grasp and form an overview of the collection by means of a cognitively simple concept. By virtue of the chronological division into three or four epochs, the exhibition is structured into separated areas. If a visitor succeeds in designating the Samarra exhibits and the Aleppo Room into two totally different epochs, or initially identifies a common narrative within the epochs themselves, a key objective will have been reached. This is augmented by a geographical and socio-spatial contextualisation, facilitating – beyond the chronological order – a clear classification of objects into at least one grid at every point. By virtue of an easily accessible and, above all, easily noticeable structure, visitors should be able to identify their whereabouts at any location in the exhibition. However, the exhibition must ensure that diverse types of visitor groups, progressing at different speeds, can pass through one of the five possible entrances from Level 2 and Level 3, before embarking on a rewarding tour of the collection. Under this access system, and due to the collection's enhanced size, it is improbable that every visitor will view every room. Consequently, it is crucial that audiences fully understand the modules of the exhibition. For within each module one can move about freely, although the transition to new sequences must be represented as a spatial boundary, or rather as a central passage. Due to the tripartite structure, i.e. the division into a southern, central and northern sequence of rooms, Level 3 has been conceived with a high degree of mobility in mind. One can pass from any room into the adjacent rooms, although access to the next module is only possible through the central circulation zone. These zones, the smaller rooms on Level 3 (Mediterranean, The Mongols, The three Empires), will also serve as introduction and orientation points.

“Multiple choice” is, therefore, *de rigueur*, the leitmotif of the design principles. This is perceived as a museological opportunity to create an “engaging museum” – yet also poses a challenge to ensure that regardless of the room, the visitor knows exactly where he or she is “within the grand plan” and that, despite this, meaningful, thematic connections can be drawn on every circuit of the Museum. This is predicated upon a well-conceived metastructure.

Metastructure

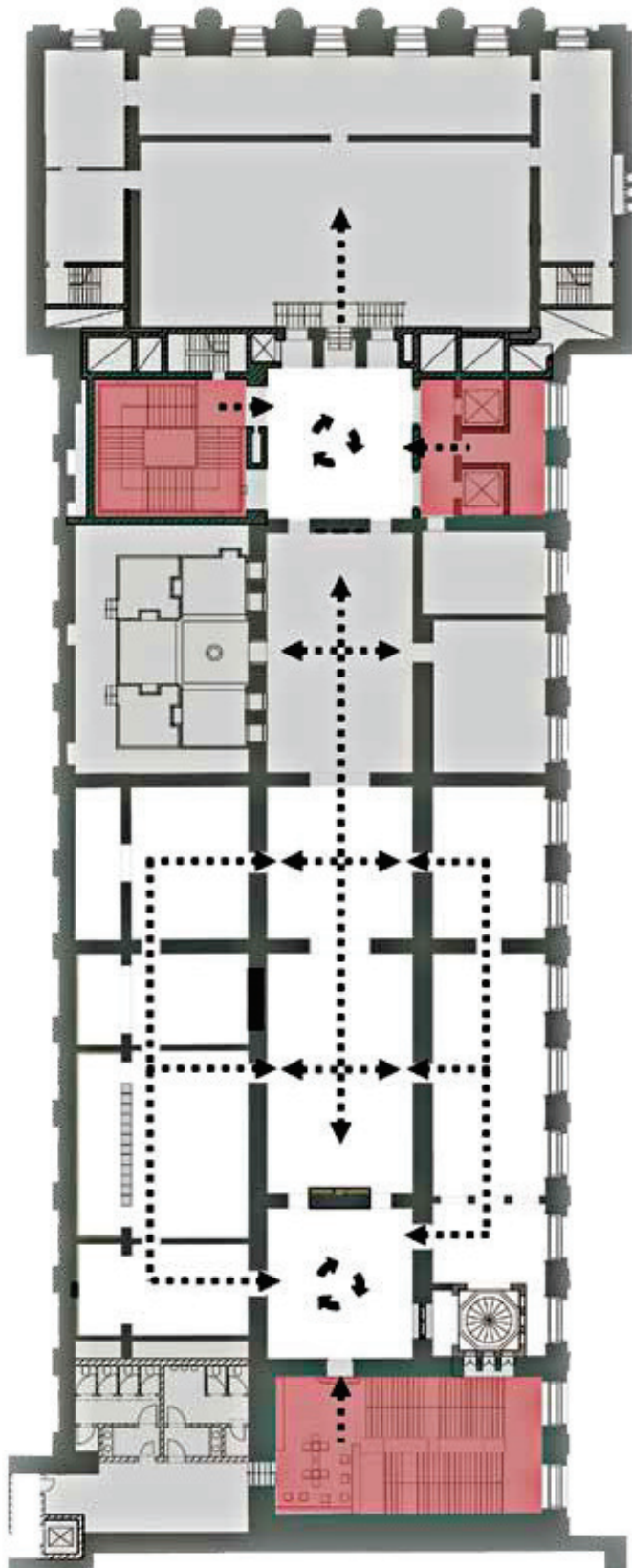
Chronology

The chronology outlined here does not claim to represent the chronology of all Muslim societies, but is founded upon the holdings of our Museum. Were objects of sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia (whose Islamisation began in the fourteenth century, but whose objects we do not possess) to be included, the formation of epochs would become more difficult. The boundaries between the various epochs are fluid, geographically diverse and manifest themselves differently, both in terms of chronology and locality. They cannot be clearly differentiated and frequently overlap. Even on a regional level, these epochs are not homogeneous entities, particularly in respect of the Middle Ages.



Distribution

Fig. 28.4: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 2, distribution flow of visitors (2010).



Distribution

Fig. 28.5: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 3, distribution flow of visitors (2010).

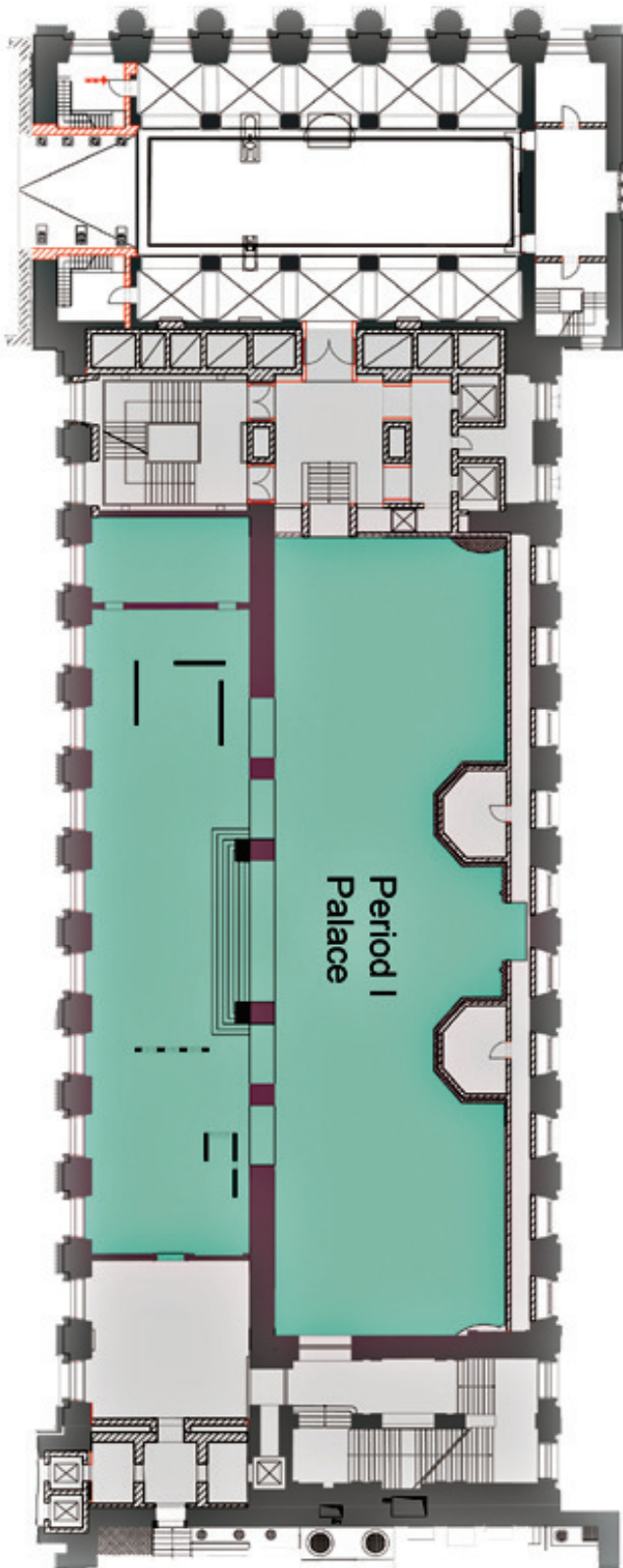
1. *Late Antiquity – the Empires of the Caliphs: From Ancient Iran and the eastern Mediterranean towards Damascus, Baghdad and Samarra – sixth/seventh to tenth/eleventh centuries*

The first epoch comprises the early period of Islam. As part of late antiquity, and based on the current state of research, this period extends from the sixth and seventh centuries until the tenth/early eleventh century. The early Islamic period is one of the key themes of the Museum of Islamic Art's collections and is the foundation upon which our institution's worldwide reputation rests. Consequently, it is to be accorded pride of place within the circuit of the permanent exhibition, not least because a large body of our holdings covers exactly these centuries. Politically speaking, this period is characterised by the great empires of the Umayyads and Abbasids, in which both the antique legacy of the Mediterranean was assimilated and cultivated, and the Old Mesopotamian and Iranian traditions were maintained and merged. The Caliphates of the Spanish Umayyads (929–1031), together with the Egyptian Fatimids (909 or 969–1171), absorbed many of the themes featured in the arts and crafts and architectural decoration of late antiquity, and ushered in the second epoch.¹⁷

2. *The Middle Times – Sultans between the Mediterranean and China: From the Mediterranean, including Cairo, Palermo and Granada, together with Kashan, Konya and Nishapur – tenth to fifteenth centuries*

The second epoch is the Middle Time, which is characterised by political fragmentation, the emergence of distinct regional forms, great diversity and crises such as the Crusade period and the Mongol invasions. India, Anatolia, the Balkans and also Southeast Asia were either conquered, or subject to growing Islamicisation. Whereas the two great empires of late antiquity on Level 2 are shown in large spacious rooms, the fragmentation of the Second Epoch is reflected in a network of smaller rooms on Level 3.

Although a number of developments from late antiquity continue, other forms mark a revival (rather than a continuation) of pre-Islamic traditions. This applies in particular to the regions under the influence of Persian culture from the tenth century onwards, and to the greater Mediterranean region in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The body of classical Persian literature, whose chief exponents include Ferdouzi, Khayyam, Saadi, Nizami, Rumi and Hafez, or new literary forms, such as the *Cosmography of Ghazwini*, begin to take shape during this period (and are to be found in our depots), in common with the classification of the main calligraphic Ducti. *Muqarnas* emerge almost simultaneously in the east and in the west and, in the wake of the Sunni revival, the *iwan* prevailed in many regions; the faience mosaic developed from the eleventh into the fifteenth century and the lustre ceramics of Kashan as well as the finest Damascene metallic vessels date from the thirteenth century – the century of crisis. The destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 and the conquest of Cordoba in the course of the Reconquista in 1236 are symbols of a historical turning point. The Mongolian conquest heralded the emergence



Eras / Themes

Fig. 28.6: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 2, thematic focus: chronology, period 1: *Late Antiquity* (2010).

Eras / Themes

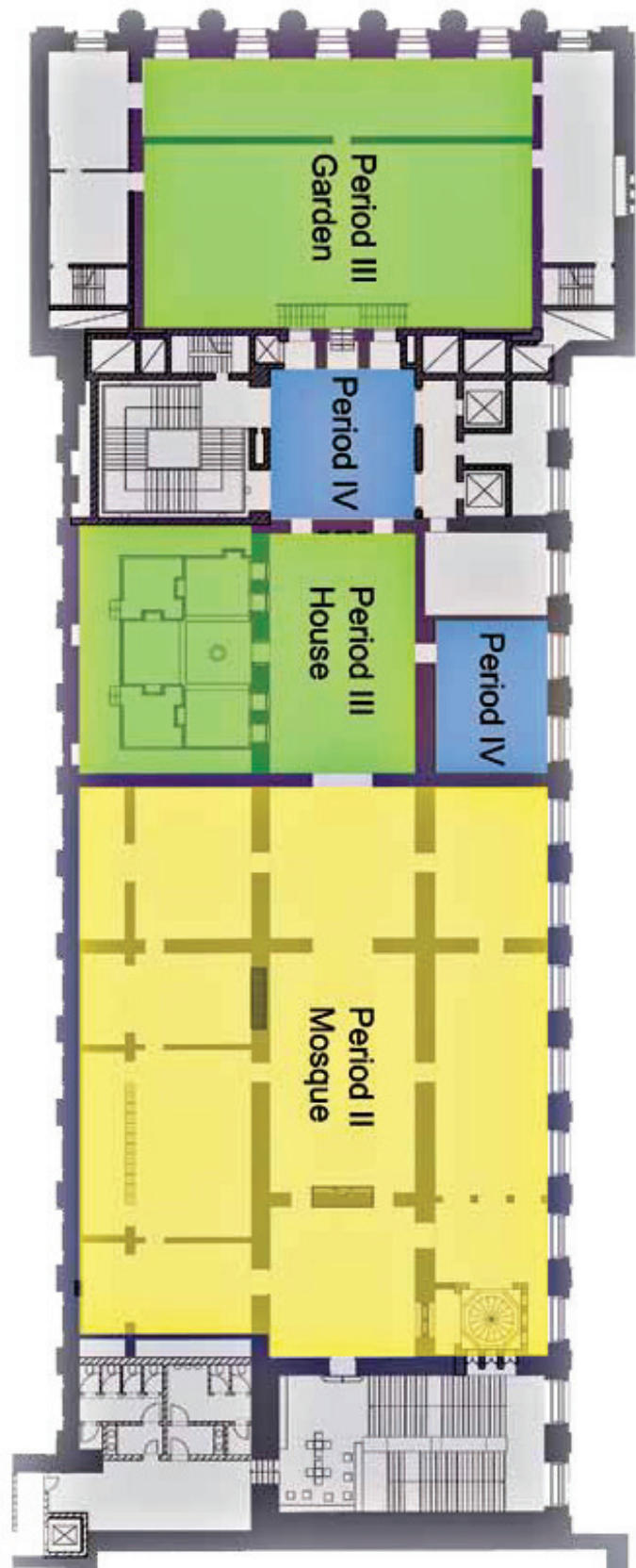


Fig. 28.7: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 3, thematic focus: chronology, periods 2–4, *The Middle Times* and *The Modern Period* (including *The Early Modern Times* and *Onset of Modernity*) (2010).

of a strong East Asian influence on eastern Islamic art, while, at the same time, the ruling elites of the Nasrids in Spain, the Merinids in Morocco and the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria gave expression to their love of kaleidoscopic decoration.

The Middle Times are exceptionally diverse and can only be construed as a collective term. In accordance with European periodisation, these centuries are often designated as the Middle Ages, which evoke false connotations within European contexts. In order to avoid this, a neutral term has been chosen.

3. *The Early Modern Times – Shah, Sultan and Great Mughals: Ottomans, Safavids and the Great Mughals from Istanbul via Isfahan to Delhi/Agra – sixteenth to eighteenth centuries*

The period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century corresponds in European historiography to the early modern period, an epoch which can also be applied to Muslim cultures. In the Middle East and South Asia, the early modern period is characterised by the rise of the three great empires of the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Great Mughals, who introduced new weaponry (gunpowder) and centralised state structures. Based on the Timurid developments in decoration and in court workshops, there emerged a “national”, non-obligatory, but bond-forming language of form. The Battle of Lepanto in 1571 is symbolic for the new relationship with Europe. Whereas the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the shifting of trade routes following the circumnavigation of Africa in 1488 and the end of Spain’s 700-year Islamic history in 1492 heralded this new epoch, colonisation, cultural transformation and the onset of modernity brought this era to a close from the eighteenth century onwards.

4. *Onset of Modernity – Europe and the Middle East: New forms in global modernity via Tebran, Istanbul and Lucknow – eighteenth to early twentieth centuries*

Our holdings only permit us to present a section of this, the fourth epoch and last chronological unit, which covers the modern era. This period is characterised by the growth of distinctive styles within the three great empires of the Islamic world, under the powerful, yet not necessarily normative influence of a Europe-dominated modernity. The modern era is usually incorporated within the “long nineteenth century”. However, the new era was presaged by the tulip style, and, above all, by the Ottoman Rococo which emerged in the 1750s, or the Nawabi style in Awadh/India. In addition to Iran, with the Qajar dynasty from the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire is accorded a pre-eminent position – as the origins of the Berlin holdings and the emergence of Islamic art history and archaeology are closely associated with developments in the Ottoman Empire. The end of the chronological tour brings us back to the beginning of our Museum, and opens the doors into an era of a multiple modernity.

We will group the last two epochs together, most probably. The special configuration of the listed building will not allow us to distinguish the *Early Modern* from the *Modern Times* clearly. This would cause confusion for the visitor. To simplify even further they would need to be grouped together as the *Modern Period*. Thus, the grand historical narratives will then be communicated through the three main eras: *Late Antiquities*, *The Middle Period*, *The Modern Period*.

But what is missing?

5. *Our Times*

Due to the nature of our holdings, and for thematic reasons, we would like to draw a line at the beginning of the twentieth century. For it was at this time that autonomous modern art forms, based on European models, became established within the various empires, from which sovereign nation states would soon emerge. With the exception of calligraphy and architecture, almost all forms of artistic design – specifically the arts and crafts – were either abandoned, experienced a rapid decline or were fundamentally transformed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have since been eclipsed by new forms of art, which are now engaged in a fruitful international exchange with European and North American metropolises; or alternatively, since the closing decades of the twentieth century, could not be ascribed geographically to any specific location. Ideally this would in fact be presented as the fifth epoch in our Museum, but we simply lack the appropriate holdings. Furthermore, this epoch does not belong in an archaeological collection, but in a collection focusing on international modernity. This problem has yet to be resolved and is the subject of much debate. In the event that Berlin simply lacks the space to accommodate this, we must ourselves seek a solution. This issue should at least be clearly addressed in the entrance area, together with the spatial-geographical demarcation of our collection outlined above.

Geography

Under the chronological order here, dynasties continue to serve as a means of orientation, or as a reference point in the exposition of the thematic links between these epochs. To convey something of the importance of these dynasties, or rather of their specific temporal and geographical characteristics, cities serve as useful placeholders, e.g. Damascus for the Umayyads, Baghdad and Samarra for the Abbasids, Cordoba/Madinat al-Zahra for the Spanish Umayyads, Cairo for the Fatimids and the Mamluks, Palermo for the Fatimids and the Normans, Nishapur and Afrasiyab/Samarkand for the Samanids, Kashan for the Seljuqs, Konya for the Rum Seljuqs, Granada for the Nasrids, Istanbul and Aleppo for the Ottomans, Isfahan for the Safavids, Takht-e Sulayman and Tabriz for the Il-Khanids, Samarkand and Herat for the Timurids, Delhi and Agra for the Great Moghuls and Tehran for the Qajars. Cities enjoy a far higher profile than dynasties and facilitate an immediate geographical localisation. These have become firmly embedded as symbols of

a dynasty in the collective memory and historical consciousness of many Muslims. The sequence of cities in the three/four epochs are interwoven into the circuit by means of a spatial network of coordinates.

Furthermore, cities also permit the spatial representation of an important item of historical “news” in the mediation of information: the Middle East is the breeding ground for urban cultures. Several of these cities are among the oldest in the world, and their complex structures are constructed of various layers of cultures: Istanbul, Jerusalem, Aleppo and Damascus all bear material witness to a history tracing back thousands of years. Consequently, they are the expression both of continuity and also of continual transformation: here the new cultural patterns of a society that evolved over the centuries (timeline) are crystallised. Urban markers help us in the Museum to illustrate the transformation of the selfsame geographical regions into new cultural spaces.

Experiencing this geographical contiguity should be possible at any juncture in the exhibition without the tour becoming a multinational survey or diminishing the strong visual impact of the individual objects. In addition to providing visitors with a direct means of orientation – a key objective of the arrangement unveiled here – we also wish to reinforce the right of the countries of origin to highlight their artistic and cultural achievements, and provide a key towards gaining a keener insight into artefacts. It is envisaged that a media station be installed at a site, where visitors can obtain information over the regions on a country by country basis – i.e. as nation states, which are not represented as such in our exhibition.

From the very outset, the duality of the cultural and geographical foundations of early Muslim cultures, namely the eastern antique Mediterranean and the pre-Islamic great Persian empires, is addressed. This localisation should also be experienced geographically: visitors bestride – if possible – the middle of a geographical grid (e.g. west = left, east = right). This becomes obvious from the very beginning: before entering the “Islamic” space through the Umayyad palace of Khirbet al-Minya, the visitor is guided to the right (east) into ancient Iran/Ctesiphon. To the left (west) the eastern Mediterranean, including the Byzantine Empire, is featured, while the centre focuses on pre-Islamic traditions of the Arabian peninsula. Symbolically, the palace of Khirbet al-Minya is intended to emphasise the threshold to a new era, which resolves the dualism of the (cultural) geographical division (a theme which runs through Level 2). Although the first two dynasties have been arranged sequentially, the visitor experiences them as a continual “flow”.

Over the two floors the geographical focuses are the Syrian region, Mesopotamia/Iraq, the Arab peninsula, the Persian region, the Mediterranean, North Africa, Spain, Anatolia, Central Asia, India and the contact with both China and Europe. On Level 3, the first room that the gallery accesses from staircase E – the Mediterranean room with a focus on Sicily – serves as the circulation space, from where it branches off towards Spain, on the one hand, and to Anatolia, and north to Africa/Egypt, on the other. In a logical thematic progression, one continues from the Mediterranean along the central axis further

eastwards. Of special significance at the next intersection is the room “The Mongols”, which in a certain manner signifies the end of the Middle Time and the beginning of the Early Modern Time. The remaining geographical contexts derive automatically from the main themes.

Socio-Spatial/Life-Sphere Arrangement

The socio-spatial arrangement in the Museum of Islamic Art follows automatically from the outstanding collection of architectural elements. This applies particularly to the Mshatta façade, the Alhambra Dome and the Aleppo Room. The spatial contextualisation matches the conception of the Pergamon Museum itself, which is founded upon the museological presentation of large-scale architecture. It enables a wider scope of information to be conveyed to the visitor (spatial context), without the need for lengthy explanations. This approach is then expanded: in the main circuit, the palace theme is developed in the form of the Mshatta façade, which ideally complements the structure of the main circuit of the Pergamon Museum (Ishtar Gate: city gate and environs, Market Gate of Miletus: city and market, Pergamon Altar: temple and cult, Mshatta façade: palace and sovereignty) and is virtually determined by the nature of our holdings themselves: boasting Ctesiphon, Khirbet al-Minya, Qusair Amra, Mshatta, Raqqa and Samarra, the Museum of Islamic Art possesses a globally unique treasure of archaeological collections from the old capital city of the Persian Parthians and Sasanids, from the Umayyad desert castles and Abbasid royal seats. Planning of the last years has ensured that the Mshatta façade can be shown in all its splendour on the longitudinal side of the North Wing: in keeping with the eighth-century original, the entire length of the ornamented façade will be reconstructed, and shown together with the original dimensions of the portal, and a simplified reconstruction of the sections lost or remaining in Jordan. Substantial breakthroughs in the opposite wall have forged the impression of a large spacious room.

In addition to the socio-spatial arrangement, we shall also endeavour to ensure that the architectural contextualisation can be experienced directly and spatially. To this end, the architectural elements are to be installed into the space as architecture. We are anticipating an *iwān* reconstruction for Ctesiphon and the reconstruction of a Samarra room on Level 2.¹⁸

On Level 3 the socio-spatial context is established by the Alhambra Dome, the prayer corners and the Aleppo Room. The first rooms on Level 3 pick up the palace theme from Level 2. Whereas the circulation space (featuring the Mediterranean theme with Palermo, South Italy and Friedrich II) leads off to the left into the palace city of the Fatimids, standing in the foreground on the right in the Spanish Cabinet are the Alhambra Dome and Granada. Thanks to the excellent plans elaborated by the team of Cramer/Sack and Claus-Peter Haase, the attention of visitors on the staircase is immediately drawn to the cupola from the “Ladies Tower” of the Partal gardens, due to a breakthrough of “Moorish windows”. Furthermore, three social-spatial/life-sphere contexts are developed in the



Fig. 28.8: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 3, thematic focus: geography (2010).

upper storey, which are of huge significance in forging an understanding of Islamic art. It is not our aim to recreate a certain sphere of life through recreating its architecture (the Konya *Mihrab* will not be part of an artificial modern mosque architecture in the galleries). However, the main architectural elements in our galleries will set the tone for an orchestration of an associated atmosphere and contextual explanation. This begins with the religious room, which develops the theme of the “mosque in the city” from the city of Konya (the prayer niches and the doors from the Beyhekim mosque in juxtaposition with the Sirçalı School and the *cuenda seca* from the tambour of the Mevlevihane, the “convent” of the Whirling Dervishes). The theme “house and urban taste” derives from the Aleppo Room (1601), the Damascene niche (c.1500) and the Qajar ceiling painting from Shiraz (1846) – an outstanding ensemble, which conveys a vivid impression of the artistic interior furnishings of the higher income groups and of the religious plurality in the Near Eastern cities. Along the central axis, two niches are positioned facing each other from a distance: the Konya *Mihrab* in the east wall looks out over the niche of a Jewish dwelling from Damascus with the corresponding Samaritan inscriptions in the west wall. Thanks to the air-conditioning systems now installed throughout the Museum, the Aleppo Room is once again accessible. In keeping with the original spatial configuration, the three seated platforms (*tazar*) and the entrance area (*ataba*) with a fountain have been reconstructed, together with the second storey and its *mashrabiyyas*. Due to the fact that the roof of the Pergamon Museum is listed, the cupola can only be intimated.

The main exhibition hall is to be dedicated to the theme of the “garden and floral designs” in addition to – as already envisaged in earlier plans – large-scale carpets. Gardens are a commonly featured *topos* in many Muslim cultures and areas of Islamic art; for example in the arts of the book, wood painting and carpets as woven gardens.. Taking centre stage will be the splendid west Persian garden carpet. The plan is to reconstruct an idealised garden, visually complemented by other artefacts, with the great garden cities and royal seats of Isfahan and Delhi forming a geographical highlight (the Safavids and the Great Moghuls).

Underscoring key themes by means of such spatial contextualisations can also be applied to other themes during the next planning phase: presenting a Dervish *tekke* in conjunction with local calligraphies (to illustrate their aesthetic dimensions); a library to exhibit book-art or *çinihanes* (“china-houses” – small niches for displaying ceramics in palaces and residential architecture), etc.

However, the socio-spatial contextualisation also enables visitors to establish further key connections to the artefacts. First and foremost, the objects are often very functional, i.e. they attest to the high aesthetic, artistic and technical standard of the everyday items used by the higher income groups. Furthermore, these objects never existed in isolation, but were coordinated aesthetically to evoke an overall impression. With the aid of miniature paintings and early photographs, one can open a window into past private parlours: fine carpets, fine textiles, valuable ceramics and metallic objects, exquisitely calligraphed



Spheres of Life

Fig. 28.9: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 3, thematic focus: socio-spatial/life-sphere organisation (2010).

books were combined to form a harmonious ensemble of artefacts. Animations based on these condensed descriptions will be on show at carefully selected places throughout the exhibition.

Key Themes

In addition to the chronological order, the strong socio-spatial contextualisations of gardens and houses and the direct geographical references, a number of key themes can be distilled on Level 3. In theory these key themes can always be expounded upon where it appears relevant and apposite to communicate content. For example, the links to China should be mentioned in reference to the Samarra ceramics. However, such is the significance of the history of the ceramics trade and ceramic production techniques within the Islamic world that this should be treated independently. This also applies to other themes, which follow from the objects themselves, the phenomenology of art and culture in Islamic societies and from specific questions posed by visitors.¹⁹ These will be addressed in two groups of rooms, off to the side of the central axis on the upper storey. Individual themes are to be dealt with to the north, with book-art warranting special emphasis. This has been made possible by the close cooperation with the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library.

The common thread linking the southern sequence of rooms is the biography of the objects. Just as the “concert of things” – the objects of various media and forms – is to be illuminated both in its primary and secondary user-context using the example of the Fatimid courts, the migration of objects is now to be explored in the next room. Most objects of Islamic art have been fashioned for sale – often for the international market. The trade routes – both over land and by sea – of carpets, ceramics etc. are retraced. The aura of an artefact – e.g. the Kashan prayer niche – is intended to fill up the next room by itself. As perhaps the visually most striking exhibit in the collection, it has proven highly successful, in combination with seating facilities in our present galleries, in underscoring the quality of this objects to visitors. We intend to retain this. The focus of the following room will be the theme artists, craftsmen and workshops based on Kashan pottery and Mosul metal work. Inscriptions with good wishes for the clients and patrons, signatures, travelling workshops, guilds, and craft organization should entice the visitors to step into the world of the objects. Examples of cultural history, materiality and the production of specific groups of material – particularly in relation to glass, ceramics and metalwork – will feature as themes in this sequence of rooms.

Similarly, the genesis of the collection and the Museum will also be examined as a key theme: the two linchpins of museums of Islamic art – archaeological excavations and the activities of collectors on the art markets – are to be addressed in special rooms.

In summary one can state that the fundamental principles of the concepts outlined here can be reduced to two core pillars: how can we mediate the objects – in their cultural, historic and aesthetic totality – to the diverse groups of visitors? As the exhibits in the

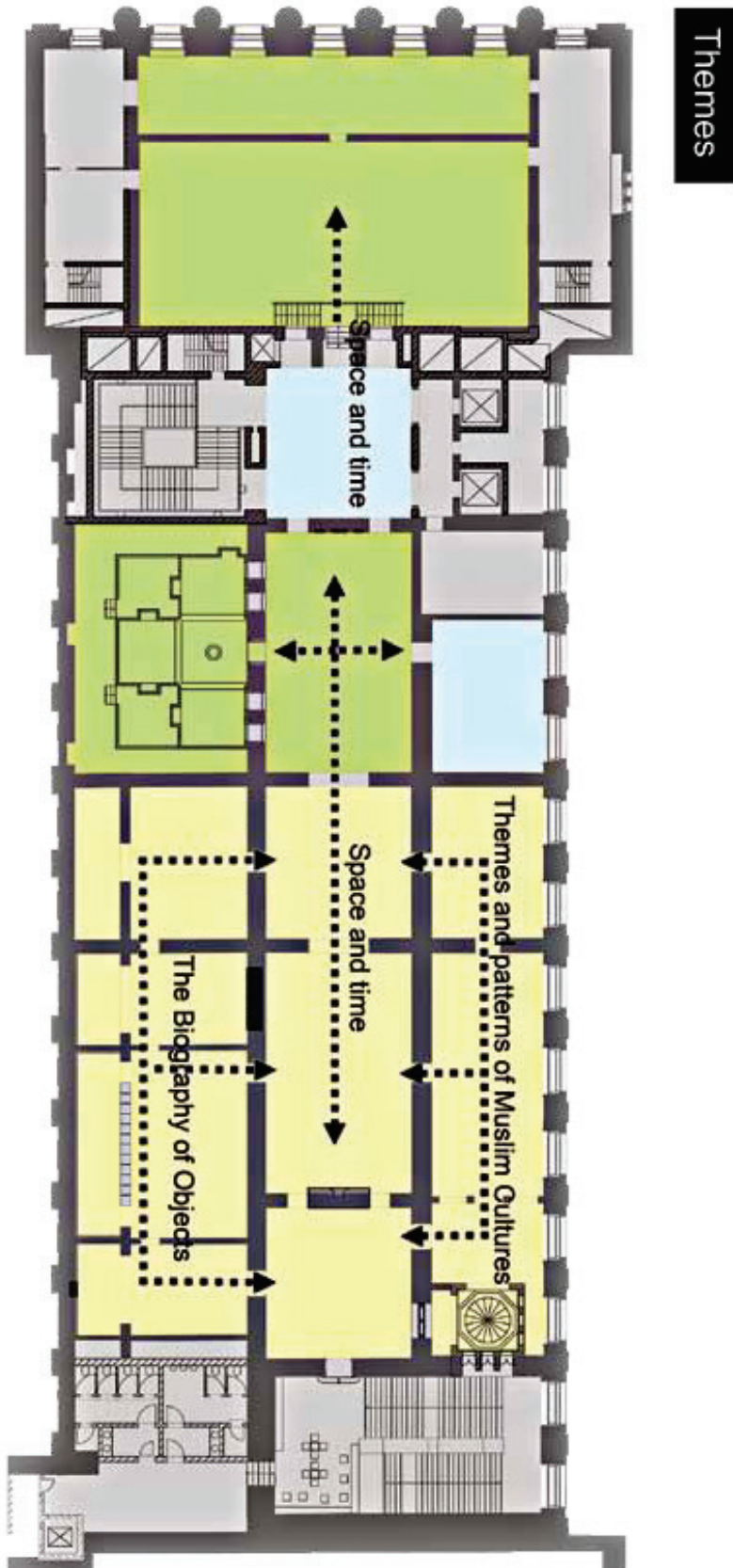


Fig. 28.10: Museum of Islamic Art 2019, Level 3, thematic focus: key themes (2010).

Museum of Islamic Art have been scientifically examined over the decades by its teams of experts, we are consequently well acquainted with the potential of our objects – notwithstanding the many research desiderata due to the abundance of the holdings and their different interpretations. However, we are still very much in the dark in terms of our scientific and empirical understanding of our visitors and their cognitive possibilities. By conducting qualitative visitor surveys, in conjunction with further research in this field and small-scale mock ups with a subsequent evaluation, we are now addressing this issue with great urgency. By virtue of the complexity of the collection, its contents and spatial structure, we require intelligent ideas and concepts, both in regard to guiding visitors and mediating facts. For example, key objects placed along a visual axis are to serve as an orientation for visitors (already provisionally pencilled into the plans), whereas in the rooms themselves a change or rather a combination of different strategies, depending upon the requirements and objects, would appear advisable. In collaboration with the architects, communications and exhibition designers and museum educators, we will over the next few years be elaborating the concept based on the provisional distribution of objects presented here, to create a hopefully diverse and yet harmonious ensemble of artefacts.

- 13 These collections along with the ethnographic artefacts from North Africa are housed in the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas and are displayed in the Sainsbury Galleries of Africa and the Wellcome Trust Gallery of Living and Dying.
- 14 These objects are housed in the Department of Asia and are exhibited in the Joseph E. Hotung Gallery of China, India, South Asia and Southeast Asia and are also shown in temporary displays.
- 15 Rather, the BM's significant collections of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture are displayed in a gallery defined by geography: the Joseph E. Hotung Gallery of China, India, South Asia and Southeast Asia.
- 16 Whether or not the name of the gallery has an impact on visitors' expectations, or indeed influences his or her choice to visit, remains to be investigated.
- 17 Wilson, David M., *The British Museum: A History*, London 2002, p. 327.
- 18 Such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Detroit Institute of Arts, Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), Royal Museum of Arts and History (Brussels) and the David Collection (Copenhagen).
- 19 The guide is available in English, Korean, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Japanese and Mandarin, and there are separate multimedia guides for children, and the hearing and visually impaired. There is a charge of £3.00–£4.50 per handset.
- 20 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/>. Some of the Addis Gallery's "masterpieces" appear on this show.
- 21 In the 1980s and 1990s the Museum of Mankind hosted several exhibitions focusing on the Islamic world, such as *Palestinian Costumes*, *Yemeni Pottery: The Littlewood Collection* and *Striking Tents: Central Asian Nomad Felts from Kyrgyzstan* curated by anthropologists such as Shelagh Weir, Sarah Posey and others.
- 22 A curator in charge of the ethnographic collections of the Middle East and Central Asia was appointed in 2009.
- 23 See the accompanying guide by Venetia Porter, *Innovation through Tradition: Contemporary Art from Iran and Pakistan*, London 2009.
- 24 For example the Shah 'Abbas exhibition was accompanied by the conference People of the Prophet's House: Art, Architecture and Shi'ism in the "Islamic World", the proceedings of which will be published in 2012.

28. New Spaces for Old Treasures:

Plans for the New Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum

- 1 Herzfeld, Ernst, "The Genesis of Islamic Art and the Problem of the Mshattā", *Der Islam* 1 (1910), pp. 27–63, 105–144, and in the same volume also Ernst Kühnel, "Ausstellung von Meisterwerken mohammedanischer Kunst in München (Mai bis Oktober 1919)", *Der Islam* 1 (1910), pp. 183–194, 369–384. See also the contributions from Troelenberg and Kröger in this volume.
- 2 After Ernst Herzfeld's first report (*Erster vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, Berlin 1912) Samarra was discussed frequently. See latest on Samarra: Northedge, Alastair, *The Historical Topography of Samarra*, London 2005 and Leisten, Thomas, *Excavation of Samarra, Volume I, Architecture, Final Report of the First Campaign 1910–1912*, Mainz 2003. On Bode's role for the Berlin Carpet collection and the birth of carpet studies: Enderlein, Volkmar, *Wilhelm von Bode und die Berliner Teppichsammlung*, Berlin 1995. Starting with Julius Lessing's studies and later by Ernst Kühnel enriched: Bode, von Wilhelm: *Vorderasiatische Knüpfteppiche aus älterer Zeit*. Leipzig 1901.
- 3 See Jens Kröger in this volume.
- 4 Not until January 2010 were the storages in east and west finally reunited and reorganised.
- 5 Adres Lepik ed., *Masterplan Museumsinsel. Ein europäisches Projekt. Zur einer Ausstellung im Neuen Museum 23.9. - 5.11. 2000*, Berlin 2000.
- 6 Incorporated into our plans was the spatial conception of the Mshatta hall with the installation of the Mshatta façade, the highly advantageous placing of the Alhambra Dome, the expert planning for the Aleppo Room as well as the hanging, or rather laying, of several carpets in the main exhibition hall on the upper storey. Many ideas unveiled here were developed in the course of discussions among

the current museum team. Proving of great assistance were the intensive conversations held with colleagues, to whom I wish to express my gratitude: Julian Raby, Gülru Necipoğlu, Barry Flood, Stefano Carboni, Scott Redford, Michael Rogers and Richard de Unger as well as the “team” Jens Kröger, Annette Hagedorn and Silke Bettermann. My thanks also go to Friederike Fless. Without the support of the Excellence Cluster TOPOI and the resulting cooperation with Désirée Heiden, the substantive reorganisation of the key theme Late Antiquity and the socio-spatial contextualisation could not have been achieved within the space of one year.

- 7 This applies first and foremost to the classical Islamic world, whereby the representation of large parts of North Africa and the Arabian peninsula, sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia proved either difficult or impossible.
- 8 Hence the corresponding department at the Victoria and Albert Museum was named “The Jameel Gallery: Islamic Middle East”.
- 9 The Archaeological Promenade of the Museum Island is one attempt to overcome this. But other museums have changed, too. The new galleries at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, for example, are in large parts a good and consequent example to overcome these institutional borders. They based their concept on shared and interactive historical experiences. Unfortunately the Islamic Art Gallery in Oxford does not follow the cultural, historical and geographical diversification. This is a missed opportunity: Muslim cultural expressions are considerably based on a transregional and intercultural exchange of ideas in the various historical phases between antiquity and modernity.
- 10 Gerbich, Christine, *Experimentierfeld Museologie. Ergebnisse der Besucherbefragung am Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin im September und Oktober 2009*, Berlin 2009, p. 9f.
- 11 *Statut für die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, Berlin 2000, p. 4.
- 12 Our warm thanks go to Susan Kamel, Susanne Lanwerd and especially to Christine Gerbich. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Bernhard Graf, Director of the Institute for Museum Research, Christoffer Richartz, Director of Visitor Services, and to Herr Steinig from the Finance Department of the SMB. For detailed information on the findings, see: Gerbich, *Experimentierfeld Museologie 2009*.
- 13 Even if the name of the dynasty is known, this does not provide the visitor with any meaningful criteria to classify the themes. If the many dynasties do not permit a clear thematic distinction, this abundance and diversity will produce merely a standardised quantity of indistinguishable elements.
- 14 Gerbich, *Experimentierfeld Museologie 2009*, p. 18f.
- 15 Gerbich, *Experimentierfeld Museologie 2009*, p. 19f.
- 16 For example: ivories from “Islamic” Egypt from the 11th/12th century are closely related to those from Constantinople, Sicily and Spain, and have nothing in common with “Islamic” Indian ivories from the 17th century. See the contribution from Gülru Necipoğlu in this volume. A similar objective was also pursued by the project *Connecting Art Histories*, launched by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence in collaboration with the Berlin State Museums (SMB).
- 17 By virtue of our holdings, this organisation of epochs can be well represented. Only Central Asia with archaeological finds from Afrasiyab (9th/10th century) is not incorporated into this region, but for thematic reasons ascribed to the second epoch.
- 18 Envisaged for Ctesiphon: groundplan and architecture of a Persian dwelling with *iwan* to the right. Khirbet al-Minya: installation of a showcase architecture, featuring a walkable three-arch arcade, integrating original architectural elements from the arches and rosettes. Samarra: groundplan and architectural elements of a dwelling from Samarra with the installation of a matching niche wall. Groundplan is reconstructed with marquetry inlaid into the floor.
- 19 Further themes could include, for example (in no particular order): antiquity as our common heritage, what is beauty in Muslim cultures, concepts of aesthetics and art, producers, workshops, guilds, patrons and users, artisanship and artists (such as Abu Sa’id, Behzad, Sinan etc.), trading routes (such as the Silk Road), writing and images, writing culture and cultural education, iconoclasm and illumination, the social order, religion, religious practices, religious plurality, law and the state, science, the history of the museum and of the discipline, archaeology and the art trade, etc. The list could be continued at length.